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Lone Mothers and Paid Work

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Abstract

In recent years in New Zealand the Government's policy of coercing lone mothers on the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) into paid work has been intensified. This thesis examines this policy and focuses on the following issues: what assists/impedes paid work for lone mothers, what policy measures are employed to facilitate and/or coerce DPB recipients into paid work, and how effective are these measures?

Three research methods were used:

- a comparative study of government policy towards lone mothers and their workforce participation in Sweden, the United States of America, Australia, and New Zealand;
- a qualitative study of six women on the DPB to provide illustrations from lone mothers' perspectives;
- analysis of material obtained under the Official Information Act to examine the assumptions behind government policy decisions on lone mothers.

All findings confirmed that women on the DPB face a formidable number of barriers and obstacles to entering paid work. The principal issues were:

- the lack of availability of suitable jobs;
- the low level of the wages for jobs available to lone mothers; and
- the lack of government provisions designed to help lone mothers reconcile their dual responsibilities as breadwinner and principal caregiver.

In both Sweden and the United States lone mothers are expected to be in paid work, and in both countries lone mothers have high workforce participation. However, these countries pursue diametrically opposed policies. In Sweden an active labour market policy and extensive welfare programmes support parents to combine parenting with employment. In the United States little support is provided, and if lone mothers cannot

find work in the private sector they are often obliged to go on a workfare programme. The disadvantages to this approach are that many lone mothers in paid work still live in poverty, and they have a very high rate of leaving work and returning to the benefit because of the lack of support for them in the workforce. There is a danger that if New Zealand continues to follow the United States' policies, the same negative outcomes will predominate here.

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Abbreviations

AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder
AS	Accommodation Supplement
BDL	Benefit Datum Line
Cabinet ETE	Cabinet Education, Training and Employment Committee
CCS	ChildCare Subsidy
CSO	Customer Service Officers
CW	Community Work
DA	Disability Allowance
DSW	Department of Social Welfare
EMTRs	Effective Marginal Tax Rates
ETSA	Education, Training and Support Agency
FS	Family Support
GAIN	Greater Avenues Towards Independence
GMFI	Guaranteed Minimum Family Income
IFTC	Independent Family Tax Credit
JET	Jobs, Education and Training
MWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
NZCCSS	New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services
NZES	New Zealand Employment Service
NZISS	New Zealand Income Support Service
OECD	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCAR	Out of School Care and Recreation
OSCAR DAP	Out of School Care and Recreation Development Assistance Programme
SNG	Special Needs Grant
SPA	Social Policy Agency
SPELD	Specific Learning Disabilities
TANF	Transitional Aid for Needy Families
TIA	Training Incentive Allowance
TOP	Training Opportunities Programme
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
WIN	Wisconsin Works
WINZ	Work and Income New Zealand
WB	Widows Benefit

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